DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 165 198 CS 502 327

AUTHOR Tubbs, Stewart L.
TITLE The Organizational Communication Consulting Spectrum.
PUB DATE Apr 75
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Michigan Speech Association (Kalamazoo, Michigan, April 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business; *Business Communication; *Communication Skills; *Consultants; *Consultation Programs; *Organizational Communication; Professional Services; Program Planning

ABSTRACT

Surveys of businesses and business managers indicate that developing communication skills within organizations is a priority. Communication consulting exists over a wide spectrum of activities that include guest speaking, conducting workshops, and conducting management training programs. These three processes can include a "canned program" that can be used again and again with different groups. Three other areas of consulting are more "demand responsive," apply to individual situations, and require a greater degree of diagnostic ability. They are: part-time consulting; contracted consulting; and full-time, in-house consulting. The most difficult part of consulting is getting started. The consultant must become known and then must sell himself or herself to a company. The initial meeting with the potential client is crucial in clarifying the needs of the client and the possible services of the consultant. (TJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED165198

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION CONSULTING SPECTRUM

Stewart L. Tubbs

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Stewart L. TUbbs

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Paper presented at the semi-annual convention of the Michigan Speech Association, April, 1975, Kalamazoo

C SS62 327

03110-120 - 1-75

ABSTRACT

This paper contains research evidence that organizations need help in developing employee communication competencies. Organizational communication consulting by experts in our discipline can help meet those needs. A consulting spectrum is included which describes various methods which speech communication scholars and practitioners can use to help meet the communication needs of organizations.

WHY COMMUNICATION CONSULTING?

Perhaps the first reaction to this paper might be "why communication consulting?" I believe that we have the ability to contribute to those who need our services. A survey of over 3,000 business managers indicated that they felt they, as well as their subordinates, needed more education and skill development in several vital communication areas.[1] Top managers responded in the following manner regarding the educational needs of their subordinates.

	Subordinate Needs Percentage
Effective Written Communication	74
Effective Speaking	67
Working Efficiently with Individuals and Groups	66
Communication in the Organization	65
Listening Skills	61

In a recent study of perceived preferences for management training, 217 corporations responded that communication skills rated a higher priority for training than planning, technical aspects of supervision, motivation skills, or technical aspects of the job. In fact, between 67 and 92 percent of those surveyed (depending on the corporate level of the respondent) rated communication skills as either a 4 or 5 on a scale from 1 (low priority) to 5 (high priority).[2]

Another survey of 195 businesses in Michigan indicated that "effective communication" was the skill most cited when they were asked what skills they look for in their potential managers and supervisors. They indicated that these skills were considered even more important than college degrees.[3]

Even in as unlikely a careeras engineering a factor analysis of job

skills indicated communication skills to be more important than technical engineering expertise as requirements for successful job performance.[4] Furthermore, formal engineering education does not typically stress the development of interpersonal skills.[5]

A survey of 147 Florida State University honors graduates in business indicated that in their profession, their college communication courses ranked second only to accounting* as having considerable importance and benefit to their business careers.[6] These surveys clearly document the high degree of importance of communication effectiveness in organizations. One behavioral scientist summarizes the situation this way:

> Managers increasingly appear to be realizing that they need help in dealing with human problems in organizations. This need is being reflected not only in industrial concerns but certainly in government at all levels, in educational institutions, in religious groups, and even in social organizations.[7]

At the same time, the speech profession has begun to show an increasing interest in developing both undergraduate and graduate courses in organizational communication. Downs and Larimer obtained survey data from 100 departments listed in the 1972 Director of Graduate Programs in Speech Communication. They concluded that organizational communication is a growing area within our discipline.[8]

It is obvious that the need for developing communication skills within organizations exists, and the supply of those able to meet such

---

*Other required subject areas rated were (in descending order of importance) finance, economics, management, business law, quantitative methods, marketing, and risk of insurance.

a need also seems to be increasing somewhat. The logical next step is to apply what we know to the problem area.

THE CONSULTING SPECTRUM

Although we may hear of colleagues who engage in consulting, conversations at professional conventions lead me to believe that a large number of our colleagues are confused as to what a communication consultant really does and how one becomes a consultant. Webster defines a consultant as "one who gives professional advice or services."[9] This helps somewhat, but there remains a wide variety of activities that fall under this definition.

Although there are undoubtedly many ways that consulting services could be categorized, this paper will include a categorization based primarily on the amount of time spent with the client. The categories are not mutually exclusive and differences in activities exist as well as differences in the length of time involved. The spectrum of organizational communication consulting activities is summarized in Figure 1 and is described on the following page.

I. Guest Speaking

Perhaps the most frequent way a professional begins to consult is by appearing as a guest speaker. Occasions may include high school commencement addresses, Rotary Club luncheons, after-dinner speeches, and guest presentations at professional group meetings. Topics will vary greatly, but they most always include some attempt to relate what the consultant knows about communication to the interests and needs of the audience. This form of consulting allows the consultant to begin

with areas he or she knows best and hopefully work toward ways in which these points can be applied to the audience members' needs.

II. Conducting Workshops

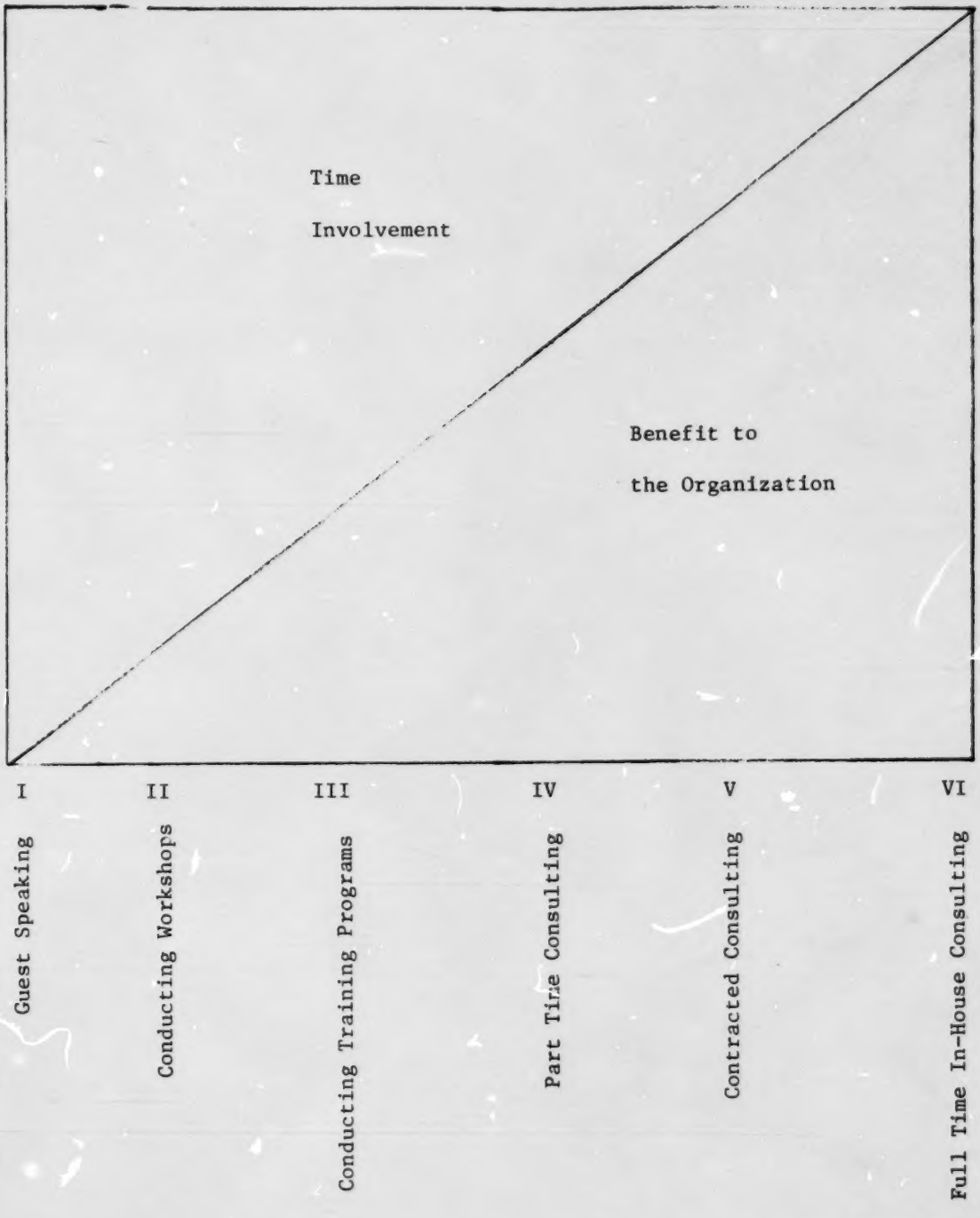
Workshops are usually designed to last from a few hours to a few days. They represent an attempt to allow greater involvement and participation for the enrollees than would a speech. Several lecturettes and focused exercises are usually included. Subject areas are unlimited, but typical areas include leadership, interpersonal communication, decision making, nonverbal communication, interpersonal encounters, and many others. Workshops may be conducted with community leaders, campus groups, or business groups. University extensions frequently sponsor such events under titles such as Institutes and Conferences, or the Bureau of Public Affairs. Short courses at our professional conventions also fall under this category. A recent advertisement from University Associates included the following sample topic areas: (1) Personal growth and laboratory education, (2) Organizational development and consulting, (3) Structured experiences in human relations training, (4) Organizational assessment and diagnosis, (5) Individual and group applications of Gestalt Techniques, (6) Leadership functions in group therapy, (7) Workshop in humanizing education, (8) Workshop in human relations training, (9) Workshop on small group training theory and practice, and (10) Personal growth lab.[10]

III. Conducting Management Training Programs

Management training programs frequently last a week or even two weeks and are an extension of the workshop concept. Since they last longer, funding is often provided by some sponsoring organization such

Figure 1

The Consulting Spectrum



as the participant's company. Although these programs come in literally hundreds of different varieties, some representative examples include: (1) American Management Association courses, (2) Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid programs, and (3) the National Training Laboratories work conferences. Michigan State University has run one week communication programs for the Agency for International Development (AID) for years.

Consulting areas I, II and II are similar in that the consultant, to a great extent, can develop a "canned program" or standard set of topics, procedures and materials which can be used again and again with different groups with minimum modification.

The next three areas of consulting tend to be more "demand responsive" and thus are likely to be novel solutions to individual situations and thus require a significantly greater degree of diagnostic ability.

IV. Part Time Consulting

As organizations develop problems, they will call upon outsiders to help them find solutions. These problems are frequently at times of semi-crisis and involve a certain amount of risk. However, communication consultants frequently have the skills required to ease the problems. For example, a top executive may need speech coaching, or even a speech writer. An organization may need a consultant to observe staff meetings to help them improve their group functioning. They may need a skilled interviewer to help collect data and feed it up to higher levels within the organization. An executive may need counseling on how to more effectively relate to his people. Finally, an organization may want to make a videotape or a film and will ask advice on how to most

effectively use the medium. Different intervention models have been developed and have differential success rates in such situations.[11]

One promising set of procedures has been developed by Giffin.[12] He employs the following nine steps:

1. Start working with top management in the organization; I obtain their full commitment or withdraw.

2. With top management discuss problem-solving practices of all permanent units in entire organization.

3. Observe problem-solving behavior of each unit; encourage them to evaluate themselves. Sometimes I help by suggesting criteria for their self-evaluation. Essentially this approach follows the concept of training in group dynamics originally employed by N.T.L.

4. Request units to report to each other their effectiveness in using the problem-solving process; as they report to each other, I watch for blocked channels of communication (both ways: horizontal, plus up and down).

5. Use sensitivity training for growth in interpersonal communication only as requested by permanent units (groups) within the organization.

6. Arrange for special types of management skill training (e.g., techniques of employee evaluation) as called for by permanent units; I try to get them to hire specialists to conduct specific short-term training programs.

7. Request the permanent units (groups) to evaluate their own improvement by use of questionnaires and interviews, we usually use out-of-house graduate students for interviews, and I may make suggestions regarding questions, but they (as a group) make decisions and manage this data-collection operation.

8. Try to develop the capabilities of selected persons within the organization (frequently the Personnel Director) to do "what I do" so that when I leave the organization, it can carry on its own development program.[13]

V. Contracted Consulting

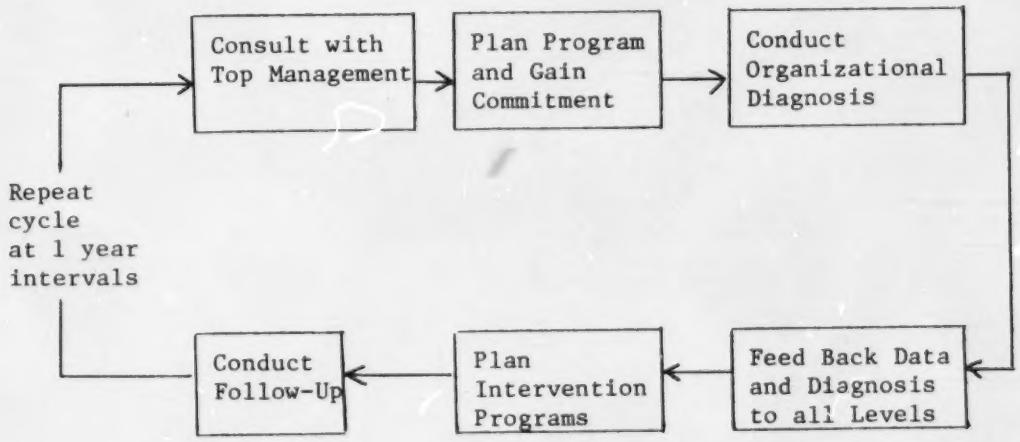
Contracted consulting usually requires that the consultant prepare a program proposal which includes objectives, procedures, personnel requirements, and a budget. The program is then funded and the

contracted program is begun. Periodic written reports are sometimes appropriate and formal written and oral reports are usually presented at the end of the program. Contracts are usually for one year, but some may last for as many as five years.

Programs of this nature are usually designed to bring about long-term systemic changes. They usually include the diagnosing of problems through systematic data collection and analysis. These procedures basically include the following procedures and have been described elsewhere.[14]

Figure 2

Consulting Model


Consult with Top Management
Plan Program and Gain Commitment
Conduct Organizational Diagnosis
Repeat cycle at 1 year intervals
Conduct Follow-Up
Plan Intervention Programs
Feed Back Data and Diagnosis to all Levels

This approach is consistent with that discussed by Appelbaum when he writes,

> Successful organizational change begins with pressure exerted on and by top administration to induce and arouse action. A consultant practices intervention at the top levels in order to begin the change process. The problem is then identified and diagnosed with the analysis of the problem to follow. Alternative solutions are usually proposed with a top level commitment to action. Some experimentation is encouraged in order to induce learning by

discovery methods on the part of team members who are actually involved in the change process. Once an acceptable solution is adopted, the practice should be initiated participatively. In essence, the consultant acts as an agent of change within the organization by identifying goals to be mutually shared, creating an open, problem-solving climate, locating the decision-making apparatus fairly close to sources of information, building trust among the team members, making competition relevant to individual/organizational goals, developing realistic, intrinsic reward systems and, also, developing a sense of ownership of organizational objectives within team members.[15]

Vi. Full-Time, In-House Consulting

For those who find themselves employed full time as a professional communication "expert" there are a number of possible departments which might utilize his or her services. These include advertising, personnel, market research, public relations, labor relations, management training, and organizational development departments.[16] Another such example is to establish a semi-permanent University Rumor Control Center which may become operational in times of crises. One such center has been described by Gilham.[17] Other possible full-time opportunities in organizations have been detailed by Piersol.[18]

Still a different variety of in-house communication consulting has been developed at Celanese Corporation. Kelly[19] describes the consultant's procedures in the following six steps:

1. An interview with the manager himself to determine his self-perceived opportunities, problems, strengths and weaknesses;

2. An interview with his immediate supervisor, to determine his "image" with upper management;

3. An interview with each of his significant peers, to determine the nature of his lateral working relationships;

4. An interview with each of his subordinates, to determine the quality of his management skills;

5. A counseling interview with the manager himself to offer specific suggestions for personal professional development (books to read, courses to attend, procedures to change, skills to improve);

6. A planning interview with the manager to discuss the nature of his subordinate relationships (how he gives appraisals, conducts counseling sessions and career-paths subordinates).

Some of these "interviews" could last from one to several hours, and could occur over one to several sessions.

It is a "top-down" approach which began with the President of the Company, and has been completed with every manager through the top three levels of management. It offers the advantages of top management endorsement (through active participation), the utilization of high validity inputs to determine individual training needs, personalized consultation (in a sense, a highly specific, one-man "workshop"), and a continuing consulting relationship which is based on extensive understanding. Other activities which may follow, such as team building exercises, or in-house workshops, are initiated from a better base of trust and confidence in the consultant.[20]

GETTING STARTED

Perhaps the toughest part of consulting is getting started. For most of us, it is difficult to approach an organization and try to sell our services. I once asked a consultant of twenty years how to get clients and he answered "I don't know, they always call me!" This didn't help me much. However, there are some good ways to begin. You can begin by giving speeches or conducting workshops for free in churches, on campus, and in the community. This will give you exposure and experience. You can also set up programs through the University Extension whose staff usually has a great deal of experience in this field. Another approach is suggested by Giffin when he suggests, "Become a participant in a workshop, then you may be asked to be an instructor, and then to give one somewhere. If you're a professor or staff member at a university, organize a workshop on a subject you know something about and bring in two or three people who know more. Pretty soon your abilities will be passed by word of mouth and you will be asked to do one somewhere else."[21]

Assuming some initial contact has been made by letter, phone or other means, the question may remain, how do I conduct the initial formal meeting. The best answer that I have run across is from Marvin Weisbord who writes,

> First Meeting
>
> I arrive, greet my prospective client, introduce myself and associate to him and his associates. We have coffee and exchange pleasantries. Each of us is deciding, silently, privately, and maybe unconsciously, how much we like the other. We look for cues. We give cues. Early on, we get down to business--or appear to. The content issues might include:

1. Our backgrounds--potential client needs to know enough about me to feel I can help, before he'll put out major problems.

2. Issues bothering client system--Are they symptomatic of other things, which are not being discussed. I always ask for examples in terms of observable behavior. "Communications" or "decision-making" are not issues you can see, feel, or pin down. Who needs to talk to whom? Why? What do they do now? What do people do when they disagree? What patterns of behavior do the people present see in the organization?

3. What changes would the people I'm talking to like to see? What things would they observe happening that would tell them they are getting desired outcomes? This step in naming outcomes is important in reducing the level of fantasy around O.D. and what it can do.

4. What first event would be appropriate to moving the system in the desired direction? Nearly always, this event should be diagnostic. It should be an activity which will heighten the awareness of the people I'm meeting with about how the issues they raise are seen by others in the system--colleagues, subordinates, customers, students, peers, etc. If the system is ready, the budget exists, and my reading of the willingness to proceed is good, I may propose a workshop activity, based on interviews. Sometimes I propose that the workshop start with interviews of each person as a first step in agenda-building (okay if no more than 10 or 12 attend). Sometimes, it makes more sense to consult to a work group within the framework of their regular weekly or monthly meetings. Sometimes, a survey questionnaire provides a data-base for a diagnostic meeting.

Whatever the event, we need a schedule, a place to meet, and a division of labor for organizing materials, sending out the agenda, etc. Sometimes these things can be decided in the first meeting. Sometimes I agree to write a formal proposal and proceed from there. Always I try to close on the next step--what I will do, what the client will do, and by what date.[22]

In the initial meeting the consultant should begin to identify what particular form of assistance the client needs. Argyris identifies five general classifications of problems that typically motivate the client to seek assistance. They are:

1. The clients may think they have identified the problem and its causes, but they do not know how to solve it. . .

2. The clients may believe that they understand the problem and the solutions, but they lack the ability or willingness to implement the solution. . .

3. The subordinates may feel impatient in their relationships with top management. They may consider the interventionist to be a person who can convince top management with the validity of the subordinates' views. . .

4. Clients do not know exactly what their problem is nor what solutions are feasible, but they wish to transfer to the interventionist the responsibility for effective diagnosis and action. . .

5. Clients do not understand clearly the problem or the solution, but they wish to cooperate with the interventionist in developing a diagnosis and course of action.[23]

To this I would add a sixth category.

6. Clients do not understand clearly the problem or the solution, and wish to block the interventionist from developing a diagnosis or course of action which they perceive as threatening to them. Richetto identifies a way of overcoming this resistance when he writes,

> I have found that organizations will let me "in the door" to study "communication" far more readily than they will let me in to study, say, "managerial style" or "employee motivation" or "organizational effectiveness." Because of most managers' static (in some cases naive) view of communication, this area of research seems "safe" to them. I have yet to meet a manager who does not desire "better communication" among his goals. In this day of "enlightened management," believing in "good communication" is analogous to being for motherhood and against sin.
>
> Further, although most of us will not readily admit that we are "poor" leaders, "ineffective" decision makers, or "minimal" risk-takers, even the most vain among us will admit to an occasional "communication breakdown" with superiors and subordinates.[24]

Argyris also offers some guidelines for reducing a client's defensiveness. He suggests the following:

> Owning up to, being open toward, and experimenting with ideas and feelings.

> Helping others to own up to, be open, and experiment with ideas and feelings.
>
> Contributing to the norms of individuality, concern, and trust.
>
> Communicating in observed, directly verifiable categories, with minimal attribution, evaluation, and internal contradiction.[25]

It would seem that people trained in interpersonal communication, if they practice what they teach, ought to be just about the best at implementing these guidelines.

In closing let me express a bit of frustration at the professional journals in our field for not doing more to disseminate information on the topic of organizational communication consulting. Our discipline desperately needs to learn ways to implement what we teach outside the four walls of the classroom. Yet even a casual glance at the citations in this paper reveals that not many journals in speech communication are represented. If our discipline is to remain vital, fresh, and relevant we must help share with our colleagues the tactics and strategies of applied communicology. Otherwise, not enough of us will even try communication consulting, and those few who do are likely to be as Townsend describes when he writes, "The effective ones are the one-man shows. The institutional ones are disastrous. They waste time, cost money, demoralize and distract your best people, and don't solve problems. They are people who borrow your watch to tell you what time it is and then walk off with it.[26]

FOOTNOTES

1. Samuel S. Dubin, Everett Alderman, and H. Leroy Marlow, "Managerial and Supervisory Educational Needs of Business and Industry in Pennsylvania," unpublished technical report, Continuing Education Business Office, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania.

2. Guveng G. Alpander, "Planning Management Training Programs for Organizational Development," Personnel Journal (January 1974), 15-25.

3. "College Diplomas Rated Low as Job Qualification in Survey," The Flint Journal, March 15, 1973.

4. Paul Mushinsky, "Performance Ratings of Engineers: Do Graduates Fit the Bill?," Engineering Education (November 1974), 187-188.

5. D. P. Hoyt, and P. M. Mushinsky, "Occupational Success and College Experiences of Engineering Graduates," Engineering Education (May 1973), 622-623.

6. H. C. Edgeworth, "Curriculum Feedback: Beta Gamma Sigma Opinion Survey of the Curriculum," Collegiate News and Views (May 1971), 13-15.

7. Herbert H. Meyer, "The Future for Industrial and Organizational Psychology," American Psychologist (July 1972), p. 609.

8. Calvin W. Downs and Michael W. Larimer, "The Status of Organizational Communication in Speech Departments," Speech Teacher (November 1974), 325-329.

9. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam, 1973), p. 244.

10. "What's Happening," University Associates Labs and Workshops, April 1974-February 1975, San Diego, California.

11. Robert H. Woody and Jane D. Woody, "Behavioral Science Consultation," Personnel Journal (May 1971), 382-391.

12. Kim Giffin, "The Role of Communication In Organizational Development Programs," paper presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association, November 1973, New York.

13. Ibid.

14. Stewart L. Tubbs and John W. Baird, "Communicating in the Organization," in Self-Disclosure and Personal Growth (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, Publishers, 1976) in press.

15. Steven H. Appelbaum, "Just What Should an Organizational Development Specialist Do?," Personnel Journal (March 1973), p. 222.

16. Donald L. Kirkpatrick, "Personnel Department's Role In Communication," Personnel Journal (April 1972), 279-282: Patrick R. Connolly, "Can a Behavioral Communication Specialist Find Happiness in the World of Business and Politics?," unpublished manuscript.

17. Shirley Gilham, "Facilitating Communication in the University," in Stewart L. Tubbs, New Directions in Communication (Flint, Michigan: International Communication Association, 1972), 77-84.

18. Darrell T. Piersol, "Non-Academic Careers for Speech Communication Majors," write to Dr. Piersol, c/o IBM Corporation, P.O. Box 10, Princeton, New Jersey 08540.

19. Charles M. Kelly, "The Role of the In-House Communication Consultant in Management and Organizational Development," a paper presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association, November 1973, New York.

20. Ibid.

21. Kim Giffin, quoted in "Consultants and Consulting," Center for Communication Research, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, April, 1974.

22. Marvin Weisbord, "The Organization Development Contract," O.D. Practitioner (a publication of the NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, Washington, D.C., Summer 1973), p. 3.

23. Chris Argyris, Intervention Theory and Method (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1970), pp. 218-219.

24. Gary Richetto,""Organizational Communication: An 'Unconventional' Perspective," in Ronald Appelbaum, Owen Jenson, and Richard Carroll, Speech Communication: A Basic Anthology (New York: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 262-263.

25. Argyris, 1970, p. 149.

26. Robert Townsend, Up The Organization (New York: Knopf, 1970), p. 104.

27. For those interested in reading more on this topic see these additional sources:

    Chris Argyris, Interpersonal Competence and Organizational Effectiveness (Homewood, Ill.: Irwin, 1962).

Richard Beckhard, Organization Development: Strategies and Models (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969).

Warren Bennis, Organization Development: Its Nature, Origins, and Prospects (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969).

Robert Carter, Communication in Organizations: A Guide to Information Sources (Detroit: Gale Research, 1972).

Gerald Goldhaber, Organizational Communication (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1974).

Ronald Havelock and Mary Havelock, Training for Change Agents (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Institute for Social Research, 1973).

J. William Pfeiffer and John E. Jones, The Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators (La Jolla, Calif.: University Associates Publishers, 1972, 1973, 1974).

"Organization Development," Journal of Contemporary Business (Summer 1972), entire issue.